



**HEARING NOTES**

**Legislative Oversight: LO22-0019**

**Quarterly Legislative Oversight Hearing - Department of Public Works**

**Committee:** Health, Environment, and Technology

**Chaired by:** Danielle McCray

**Hearing Date:** May 11, 2022

**Time (Beginning):** 5:00 PM

**Time (Ending):** 6:40 PM

**Location:** Du Burns Council Chamber

**Total Attendance:** Approximately 40 people

**Committee Members in Attendance:**

Danielle McCray      John Bullock      Mark Conway  
Phylicia Porter      James Torrence

Bill Synopsis in the file? .....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Attendance sheet in the file? .....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Agency reports read? .....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Hearing televised or audio-digitally recorded?.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Certification of advertising/posting notices in the file?.....	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Evidence of notification to property owners? .....	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Final vote taken at this hearing? .....	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

**Major Speakers**

*(This is not an attendance record.)*

Jason Mitchell, Department of Public Works  
Yosef Kebede, Department of Public Works  
Matthew Garbark, Department of Public Works

**Major Issues Discussed**

1. Chairwoman McCray called the hearing to order and explained the purpose and goals of the hearing.
2. Jason Mitchell and Yosef Kebede presented for the Department of Public Works (DPW) on the Bureau of Water and Wastewater’s operations (presentation in file).

3. Agency representatives responded to Councilmember questions:
- a. How do the current staff vacancy rates for the Bureau and its Divisions compare to the pre-pandemic vacancy rates? There are more vacancies now and DPW is working with DHR to fill vacancies as quickly as possible. DPW will provide data to the committee comparing current and pre-pandemic vacancy rates.
  - b. Are the currently funded staff positions enough for the Bureau to meet its responsibilities? The Bureau is currently maintaining services but needs to fill vacant positions.
  - c. What are the Bureau's short- and long-term strategies for staffing? The Bureau is working on early recruitment, succession planning, and knowledge capture processes.
  - d. Has the Bureau considered contracting to fill needs for specialized roles? The Bureau has contracts for wastewater and drinking water treatment staff augmentation.
  - e. Was there a request for proposals (RFP) for the City's agreement with HomeServe and will DPW evaluate its performance before extending the agreement? DPW is planning an RFP in the near future.
  - f. How much was the resident share for repairs and preventative measures under the current HomeServe agreement? DPW will review data and send the information to the committee.
  - g. How many Expedited Reimbursement Program (ERP) applications have been submitted and how many have been paid? For FY 22 there were 47 ERP applications, and none have been paid. For FY 23, 13 building backups qualified for the Sewage Onsite Support Cleanup (SOS) Program.
  - h. What are the eligibility criteria for assistance replacing home water and sewer lines? Eligibility is the same as the Water4All program.
  - i. When will MDE respond to the City's proposal to continue the SOS program? Probably within a few weeks.
  - j. Will DPW provide advance notice to residents for projects that could impact home water and sewer lines to give residents the chance to sign up with HomeServe? DPW's process for projects includes resident notification and it will ensure proper notification moving forward.
  - k. How many workers in the Bureau are currently eligible for retirement? 700.
  - l. Has DPW made changes to the water billing system as a result of the most recent audit? DPW concurred with the audit findings, and it has drafted new standard operating procedures (SOPs), is rewriting its billing manual, and is working on training and implementation planning. The changes should be complete by June or July.
  - m. What are the number of households participating in the Water4All program, the average water bill discount through the program, the average processing time for Water4All program applications, the number of Water4All program applications rejected, and the primary reasons for rejection? DPW will follow up with the information after the hearing.
  - n. How does DPW ensure compliance with SOPs? Staff are trained on the SOPs and the quality assurance team will spot check calls for service to measure performance. DPW also conducts surveys by email and/or phone to track customer satisfaction.
  - o. How is DPW ensuring data quality and using data to identify problems? DPW is creating a data unit in cooperation with BCIT to ensure data quality and appropriate use.

- p. What is the status of the Back River Wastewater Treatment Plant? DPW summarized the situation and noted that there is ongoing litigation.
  - q. How has DPW engaged residents impacted by the issues at Back River? DPW and MDE have released public statements and updates on the situation.
  - r. Is DPW tracking compliance at Back River? Yes, DPW's permits require monitoring and monthly reporting. Those reports are available to the public. DPW will share its compliance data with the committee.
  - s. What causes sewer system problems during wet weather if the stormwater system is separate? Both systems are old and cracks in each allow stormwater and sewage to pass between the systems.
  - t. Has DPW met its goals for stormwater/sewer main replacement? DPW expects that it will not meet the 15-mile replacement goal this fiscal year, but is targeting 20 miles for FY 23. DPW will send data for replacement going back to 2013.
  - u. How does DPW ensure worker safety? DPW conducts safety training, provides awareness materials, and audits facilities.
  - v. What green infrastructure has DPW installed to improve water quality? DPW staff summarized the projects that have been installed and those that are planned, including stream restoration and bio-retention projects.
  - w. Does DPW assess why staff have left? Yes, that is included in the knowledge capture process. DPW will provide the data it has collected.
4. Chairwoman McCray noted that the next hearing on LO22-0019 would be on Wednesday, August 17, 2022, and recessed the hearing.

### Further Study

**Was further study requested?**

**Yes**     **No**

**If yes, describe.**

The Committee requested the following additional information from DPW:

1. The current staff vacancy rates compared to pre-pandemic staff vacancy rates for the Bureau of Water and Wastewater.
2. The share paid by residents for water and sewage line repairs and preventative measures under the City's current agreement with HomeServe.
3. The number of households participating in the Water4All program, the average water bill discount through the program, the average processing time for Water4All program applications, the number of Water4All program applications rejected, and the primary reasons for rejection.
4. Monitoring and compliance data for the Back River Wastewater Treatment Plant.
5. Data on the miles of stormwater and sewer mains replaced from 2013 to present.
6. Data collected by DPW on why staff have left.

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*Matthew Peters*

Matthew L. Peters, Committee Staff

Date: May 12, 2022

Cc: Bill File  
OCS Chrono File